



Mississippi Emergency Management Agency

Joint Information Center
Joint Field Office
Biloxi, Mississippi



FEMA

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COMMUNITIES HAVE UNTIL FEB. 28, 2006, TO COLLECT DEBRIS ROE REQUESTS

BILOXI, Miss. – Local governments requesting federal funding for debris removal on private property have until Feb. 28, 2006, to collect signed Right of Entry (ROE) requests from residential property owners.

The date coincides with the last day state agencies, local governments, eligible private nonprofit organizations and tribal authorities can submit “Requests for Public Assistance” under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Assistance program.

“Due to the extensive damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, we felt it necessary to extend the timeframe for local governments to submit their requests for public assistance,” said Nick Russo, federal coordinating officer for the Mississippi disaster recovery. “As the deadline approaches, we feel confident we have addressed the majority of these issues.”

FEMA policy allows local governments to request debris removal from private residential property if local authorities determined there was a health and safety threat posed by the debris. Under the process, homeowners could submit a Right of Entry request, which would then be evaluated locally and forwarded to FEMA for review.

To date, local governments in 17 Mississippi counties that requested this assistance have identified more than 59,000 ROEs. Those counties are Covington, Forrest, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jasper, Jones, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lincoln, Pearl, Perry, Simpson, Stone and Wayne.

Some owners of private residential property have requested demolition of remaining structures as well as debris removal and these ROEs also must be in by Feb. 28, 2006.

Through March 15, 2006, FEMA’s Public Assistance program is authorized to pay 100 percent of the eligible cost for debris removal in Mississippi. After that date, FEMA will pay 90 percent, with the state and local governments to pay the remaining 10 percent.

In some communities, local officials are contracting for their own debris pickup and submitting documentation for reimbursement through the state, as is usually done under FEMA’s Public Assistance program. Other communities have asked FEMA to provide direct federal assistance by tasking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to do the work.

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All are working as expeditiously as possible, but there are some steps and reviews that must happen before any structure comes down or debris is removed from private property. The process is as follows:

- Owner signs ROE allowing authorities and contractors on private property for inspection and work action for debris removal only or demolition and debris removal.
- Local authorities review the request. If they identify a structure as unsound and a threat to public health or safety, the local government can condemn it and choose to have it demolished.
- The structure is inspected and secured by having all utilities disconnected.
- In accordance with federal laws, FEMA reviews the property for any environmental or historic preservation issues. If the ROE is for debris removal only, there are no issues, unless the action may affect a historic building or an archeological site. If demolition involves a structure built before 1961, FEMA reviews it for structural integrity and historical significance and sends a recommendation to the state historic preservation officer (SHPO) for concurrence. If there are no issues, the structure can be demolished.
- The demolition and debris removal is done by contractors for the community that is the applicant for Public Assistance or by contractors for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in communities that chose to have the work done as a federal mission assignment.

If the debris or structure is not determined to be a public health or safety threat, it is the property owner's responsibility.

Insured property owners may be able to get financial assistance for debris removal through insurance or through a disaster loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

At any time property owners can ask their local officials for additional information or withdraw their Right of Entry requests. Local officials have direct contact with the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), which works as the grants manager for FEMA Public Assistance.

FEMA manages federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates mitigation activities, works with state and local emergency managers, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program. FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on March 1, 2003.

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